

Combines Investigation Act

this stage. I feel that all possible considerations, both for and against the bill, have been placed before the house, and that the amendment I am about to move I explained quite fully in my speech on December 17. Consequently, as I say, I do not propose to say much about it today. I think that we should avoid endless repetition.

This measure has received widespread support throughout the country. The federation of agriculture has placed its support behind this measure, as have the Canadian Congress of Labour, the Co-operative Union of Canada and the Canadian Association of Consumers. Consequently, I take it that the measure is, in the main, reasonably satisfactory to very large groups of people in this country who have spoken through their various organizations, as is their democratic right. I am sorry, however, that the bill does not contain certain provisions. I have to move that the bill be not now read a second time, because that is the only form that one can use. But I hope that the house will accept the amendment that I propose to move, and that the bill may be strengthened in regard to the matters I have already mentioned. Even if that were not the case, I think the bill as it stands is preferable to leaving the matter as it has been. We have had a number of investigations into price maintenance, either directly in a few cases or indirectly in a number of cases, by the combines investigation commissioner. I do not need to enumerate them. I regret that the bill does not give some protection, which I think many retailers have quite legitimately requested, against price cutting and the advertising of loss leaders. As I said on Monday, I think the hon. member for Spadina (Mr. Croll), when he made a motion before the special committee, moved something that was worthy of more consideration than it received. I also think some steps should be taken to prevent the discrimination that exists as between big dealers and small dealers.

Manufacturers give substantial discounts to dealers who buy large quantities of goods. This makes it more difficult for the individual small retailer to compete with these large organizations. I should have liked to have seen something in the bill to regulate this. I said the other afternoon, and I repeat, that certain of our farm commodities such as wheat are sold at the same unit price per bushel whether an individual buys fifty bushels, a hundred bushels or a million bushels. I think something might be done along those lines. I will not say that you could completely overcome inducements to buy in large quantities. I think we could enact legislation that would at least regulate this factor.

[Mr. Coldwell.]

As I said the other day, my amendment is in line with what I believe the Trades and Labour Congress recommended to the committee, and I thought that organization struck a note that this house should seriously consider, that is if we are to have regulation, and apparently there must be some regulation.

My hon. friends of the Progressive Conservative party, who have opposed price control by publicly appointed bodies or bodies appointed by this parliament, have been urging that manufacturers' private interests should be allowed to exercise a very large measure of control over retail prices; that is not good. But I do think that the public has some right to have some control over price levels in the interests of the consumer and of the individual who handles goods on the way to the consumer. As I stated, I believe that on Monday I said all that I need to say regarding this matter. It has been so well debated and at such length in this house that I feel it would be repetitious to say anything more than I have said. I am going to move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles):

That Bill No. 36 be not now read a second time but that it be resolved that in the opinion of this house consideration should be given to the introduction of legislation providing that where regulation of resale prices is in the public interest such regulation should be under public control instead of under private control.

If this amendment should be approved by the house, we shall be delighted. If, on the other hand, it is not approved by the house at this stage, I hope the government will give some attention to these matters during the recess and ask the combines commissioner to consider the matter and make some recommendations, so that we may round out the bill now before us in such a manner that it will be satisfactory to the consumer and at the same time give those retailers in the smaller places more protection than they otherwise would have.

Right Hon. L. S. St. Laurent (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I might be allowed to say just a word about the position of the government with respect to this amendment. The adoption of this amendment would, of course, mean that there would be no legislation at this session. In spite of the hope expressed by the hon. member that it would be accepted, I think that he will be content with the second hope that consideration between now and the next session will be given to other problems that may arise in connection with the regulation of prices.

I might say that, on this second part of the report of the joint committee on combines legislation, the part that deals with the danger